

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Gerber Scientific Products Inc

Connecticut State Technology Extension Program

Gerber Scientific Products: Intelligent Products, Intelligent Production

Client Profile:

Gerber Scientific Products, a division of Gerber Scientific, Inc., is the world leader in the development and manufacture of computerized sign making and specialty graphics systems, software, and accessories. Serving sign shops and graphics professionals worldwide with comprehensive engineered solutions for digital color printing and dimensional signage needs, Gerber Scientific Products employs 300 people at its South Windsor and Manchester, Connecticut sites.

Situation:

Gerber Scientific Products continually seeks to improve its own production methods, customer satisfaction, product quality, and sound corporate culture. The company was excited about using lean manufacturing tools like 5S and Value Stream Mapping, as well as Six-Sigma and Management By Fact, to get improvements started in several production areas. Gerber Scientific Products selected Harry Gagnon, a respected employee with over 22 years at Gerber, to spearhead Gerber's lean initiative as Continuous Improvement Coordinator. Mr. Gagnon's supervisors also enlisted the help of the Connecticut State Technology Extension Program (CONNSTEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate.

Solution:

CONNSTEP acted as an enabler to get the project going and helped Gerber Scientific Products obtain financial support for training from the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL). Since the project's inception, over 75 percent of operations personnel have been trained in lean principles and practices, plus 44 percent have also been trained in intensive value stream mapping (VSM) techniques. VSM techniques help people to see waste in an operation and make it possible to create no-cost or low-cost improvements on the spot. After one of the first VSM sessions, it became clear that paper work orders were hampering, not expediting, the production process and that many items needed for production were not placed where they were actually needed. Using the information gathered from VSM, the team was able to eliminate subassembly work orders by 90 percent and cut kitting down by 93 percent, resulting in instant improvements in productivity.

Seventeen training sessions, including 5S, line balancing, and cell design, as well as the two basic lean courses, have made their mark on the minds of Gerber employees. Employees are excited about the changes rendered by lean

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implementation projects and are actively seeking opportunities for additional improvements. Gerber's lean team integrated point-of-use storage (POUS) to cut "walking around" time, thereby increasing employee productivity. The company also made considerable safety improvements by simply building on moveable cart-less lifting and more efficient movement through the plant.

Gerber Scientific Products now finds its customers responding to the changes that lean made to operations. The company has heard positive comments about the improvements Gerber has accomplished in service, delivery, and quality.

The company claims its service is better because the infrastructure of the company now allows people to respond better--not only manufacturing, but the entire company is able to respond with the right information at the right time.

Results:

Trained 75 percent of operations personnel in lean principles and practices.

Trained 44 percent of operations personnel in value stream mapping techniques.

Reduced subassembly work orders by 90 percent.

Reduced kitting by 93 percent.

Cleaned and organized facility to create a safer workplace environment.

Improved employee productivity.

Improved employee morale.

Testimonial:

"The Connecticut State Technology Extension Program has been an unbelievably cost-effective partner for us during these continuing improvements. Throughout the company there is now a feeling that things CAN be changed, that ideas for improvement will be acted upon."

Elaine A. Pullen,, Senior Vice President